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THE MODERN FRENCH THEATRE

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WITH CRITICAL NOTES ON SOME OF THE PRINCIPAL FRENCH ACTORS

BY

WALTER HERRIES POLLOCK

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THE MODERN FRENCH THEATRE.

It is not a little strange that the French theatre from which so many other theatres in this age borrow plays of all kinds, should from the time of Jodelle, who flourished in the reign of Henri II to that of Corneille have been occupied by one set form of drama, an imitation of the classical tragedy. In Corneille's *Cid*, which was founded on the work of two spanish dramatists Guillen de Castro and Diamante was the germ of the romanticism that in the present age rose to its full height, after a great struggle with the upholders of the traditional classic school. In 1829 on the boards of the Français, then the very temple of the classical drama, as it is now the chief shrine both of the old and the later drama, Alexandre Dumas produced his « *Henri III et sa Cour* » a romantic drama of great power, written in prose. This met with some opposition from the classicists, but the storm of battle did not burst till the following year when at the same theatre Victor Hugo's *Hernani* was given. It is difficult for a spectator at the present performances of this great play to realise the fury which it excited forty-eight years ago. Party spirit rose as vehemently over its merits or demerits as it has lately done in England over the Eastern Question. The riot inside the theatre may be compared to the O. P. riots in England; but the feeling outside the theatre has never been equalled in the case of any art controversy in England. M. Hugo received threatening

letters every day, and two of his admirers used to escort him from the theatre to his house every night during the run of the play, to guard him from the danger of a sudden or secret attack. Duels were fought on the subject of *Hernani*; a dying man wished to have his tombstone inscribed with a testimony to his belief in M. Hugo's genius; and before the play was withdrawn every single line in it had, on one occasion or other, been hissed by its opponents. The hatred felt for it was like that which inspires religious persecutions. Now lines are spoken in its representation which even on its production some ten years back were deemed too dangerous for utterance; and there would be universal surprise if a dissentient voice were heard among the audiences which assemble to witness it. *Hernani*, in spite of faults which need not here be dwelt upon, is a fine type of the poetical romantic drama of which M. Hugo is the acknowledged master. Another form of the romantic drama was cultivated by a poet whose genius is as penetrating as M. Hugo's — Alfred de Musset. His dramas, which are of so delicate a fibre that they cannot be fitly interpreted any where but at the Français, have this in common with the classic models, that they constantly suggest the idea of a fate overriding the actions of men. He had a singular power of concentration in his dramatic writing. In one speech, in one line, he can lay bare a life time of tragedy; and, in many of his plays beneath the brilliant surface of comedy there is a current of tremendous passion which, when once it shows itself, strikes and blasts the senses like a storm of lightning descending in the midst of a summer day.

It would be well if any of Musset's poetic power had descended to the comedy writers of the present day. To M. Augier indeed it has in a sense descended

and in some degree also to M. Coppée. M. Augier's play *Les Fourchambault,* which is not by any means his best, has been immensely successful at the Français, and its success is a healthy sign of reaction against the low tone of plays which for some years past have chiefly represented the modern art of play writing in France.

There are some striking remarks made by Schlegel upon the French comedy of a former period. The object of these comedies, he observes, is no longer life, but society. « That perpetual negotiation between conflicting vanities which never ends in a sincere treaty of peace — the embroidered dress, the hat under the arm, and the sword by the side—essentially belong to them, and the whole of the characterization is limited to the folly of the men and the coquetry of the women. The insipid uniformity of these pictures was unfortunately too often seasoned by the corruption of moral principles, which, especially after the age of Louis XIV, till the middle of the century under the regency and Louis XV, it became the fashion openly to avow. In this period the favourite of the women, the *homme à bonnes fortunes*, who, in a tone of satiety, boasts of the multitude of his conquests too easily achieved, was not a character invented by the comic writers, but an accurate portrait from real life, as is proved by many memoirs of the last century even down to those of a Bésenval. We are disgusted at the unrivalled sensuality of the love intrigues of the Grecian comedy, but the Greeks would have thought the intrigues with married women in the French comedy entered into merely from giddy vanity, much more disgusting. If in the constant ridicule of marriage by the *petits maîtres*, and in their moral scepticism, especially with regard to women, the poets merely intended to censure a prevailing depravity, the picture is not therefore the less dangerous.

The great or fashionable world, which in point of numbers is the small, but which considers itself as alone of any importance, can hardly be improved by it, and the example is but too seductive for the other classes from the brilliancy with which the characters are surrounded. But in so far as comedy is concerned, this deadening corruption is by no means entertaining and in many pieces in which fools of quality give the tone, as in the 'Chevalier à la mode' of Dancourt, for instance, the picture of complete moral dissoluteness, which though true is both unpoetical and unnatural, is not only wearisome in the extreme but most decidedly disgusting. » So writes Schlegel of the French comedy of the past time, and so might he write, with a difference, of that of the present day. The embroidered dress, the hat under the arm, and the sword by the side, have vanished, but the folly of the men and the coquetry of the women have remained as the staple of the play. Alexandre Dumas, *fils*, contends that his plays are all admirably moral. And they are so in this sense, that when analyzed the picture which they present of vice and its consequences is revolting. But the mass of the public who fill a theatre do not care to analyse. They do not pierce beneath the surface; they come to be amused, and they depart with the immediate impression of what has amused them in their minds. The constancy with which a theme is put before them cannot but lead them in the end to believe in its constant and pervading existence. When an author who has power enough to make his writings lifelike, even if they were not informed with life by the perfection of acting, presents to an audience always the same aspect of human affairs, they are induced at last to believe that aspect to be the true one. The author shows them a never-varying picture of men whose honour is base-

ness, and women whose strength is vice; and the public become disciples to his creed. In one of this writer's successful plays the man who is set up as a type of honour among others who are supposed to be far below him, is so placed that he must either betray a woman's secret or see his friend rush into a disgraceful marriage. In this position he not only warns his friend, a course which may be justified, but subsequently makes sport of the woman's humiliation. And it is after this that his friend says — speaking to the girl whom he is to marry — « Vous épousez le plus honnête homme que je connaisse. » The moral objection to this kind of play is not the only one; the want of relief to the unpleasant side of nature found in most of them, occasions them to be, as Burnett said King William III, was, « of a disgusting dryness. » There is another school of comedy-drama which has been highly successful, and of which Octave Feuillet may be said to be the leader.

This school delights in enlisting sympathy for vice by means of surrounding it with an alluring and mystifying sense of poetry and exaltation. The personages of plays of this kind are always hovering between good and evil; they walk between the dominions of virtue and vice and keep one foot in each. The heroines are women who are not to be judged like ordinary mortals « They resemble » as M. Feuillet says of one of them « stars escaped from their orbits : they deal to day in heroism to morrow in crime. » By dint of talking a great deal of their good qualities which are kept in the background, the writer awakes a kind of spurious sympathy with their bad ones which are but too obvious. Let it be noted that the French are not to be credited or discredited with the invention of this kind of drama, which can be traced to Kotzebue and the German stage. All

that the French can fairly be reproached with is being much cleverer than the German dramatists, and making their scenes of dubious morality much more attractive. Within the last few months as has been said a kind of reaction has set in favour of « pièces saines; » whether it will last or not remains to be seen; but meanwhile both M. Sardou's *Les Bourgeois de Pont-Arcy* and M. Augier's *Les Fourchambault* show that what parisian critics call « pieces saines » are capable of attracting audiences.

May, 1878.

M. GOT.

So much has been written recently about the French stage, and in particular about the Théâtre Français, that in speaking of French players it seems necessary only briefly to recall attention to the advantages under which the drama flourishes in Paris. There are several theatres there which receive a subsidy from the Government; and at the head of these, as indeed at the head of all theatres, stands the institution of the Comédie Française, to which the first subvention was granted in 1683 by a document signed by the king and countersigned by Colbert. We need not discuss the various changes which have taken place in the theatre between that date and this; but to take an instance of the high estimation in which its company has ever been held we may bring to our readers' minds the striking incident of the First Napoleon finding time at Moscow to draw up and sign a long list of articles for the regulation of the Comédie Française. At the present day the walls of the Théâtre Français contain a miniature state with excellent laws well administered by its officers. The numerical strength of the company is, compared with that of most theatres, enormous; and among its members there are seldom found any inefficient. This makes a constant change of perfomance possible, and thus gives to the actors the repose both of actual rest and of variety which is much wanted in England. A *sociétaire* of the Comédie Française will hold up his hands in horror at hearing of an actor playing a trying part five or six nights a week and for several weeks in succession. The annual gains of a leading player at the

Français in his prime naturally enough fall short by a great deal of what a successful actor may hope at the first recognition of his powers to make in England. Against this disadvantage the *sociétaire* of the Français may set, besides the knowledge that he is working for the advancement of art, the assurance of a pension when he retires.

First among the *sociétaires* of the Comédie Française, by virtue of his position as doyen, and certainly among the first by reason of his powers is M. Got. An actor who infuses a strong reality into whatever part he undertakes, he combines rare qualities of humour which never fails, and pathos which seldom falls short of its mark. He has gestures which are peculiar to him, especially that of pointing at an object with a jerky movement of both hands; yet his assumptions are every one so well marked that he could not be called a mannerist. He is so imbued with the feelings of the character he represents that even his back can be eloquent. There is a story current that M. Got was offered the part of the abbé on the first production of Musset's *Il ne faut jurer de rien;* that he accepted the part on condition of being allowed to play it after his own conception; that the result, contrary to the expectation of the author and all who attended rehearsals, was admirable; and that this was the player's first success. As M. Got, however, had appeared a year before as Mascarille in the *Précieuses ridicules*, the story is probably not more than half true. However that may be, the abbé, with his ill-fitting rustic clerical garb, his awkward good nature, his mixture of pride in his position and submission to the baroness who orders him about, is one of M. Got's most humorous performances. There is a formal grotesqueness in the abbé which is irresistible. On one occasion he is called away suddenly

by a servant. What the man's message is can only be guessed from the abbé's look and action; but it would be easy to construct a whole history out of the confused exit which he makes, with his hat, hurriedly sought for, planted on the edge of his head, with a long bent back, with one hand stretched before him, as if to grasp his goal, and the other trailing with a stiff forefinger behind him. In another scene the baroness asks him suddenly, « Have you read the 'Wandering Jew', abbé? » I the struggle which ensues between his desire to propitiate his patroness and his fear of seeming to countenance an unholy book, and the relief with which at last he discovers a compromise, are in the highest sense comic. Again he commands the attention of the audience merely by employing an interval when the baroness leaves him unnoticed in wiping his spectacles with a ludicrous concentration. Whatever the abbé is doing one cannot help looking at him; and one comes away laughing at him and yet liking him.

The list of M. Got's successful perfomances is, like that of other actors at French theatres, so long that we can mention but a few of them. With the grotesque humour of the abbé may be contrasted the deep feeling displayed in Le Duc Job. Le Duc Job is a nobleman of broken fortunes, and the hero of a play which, without M. Got's acting, might be dull enough. He has served in the army, and you recognise this fact during his first scene, as much from something indefinable in his bearing as from his mechanically handling his cane as if it were a sword, while he listens to a long story, told by a vulgar financier, to whom his bearing is perfectly courteous, and yet, to one looking on, perfectly disdainful. At times, recalling the habit of his soldiering days, he hums the fanfare of the trumpets. His feelings he has learnt, taught in a hard school, to conceal be-

neath an appearence of indifferent cynicism. This resource fails him utterly once when the news of his dearest friend's death reaches him. At first he is stupefied by the shock ; the talk of the financier who has unfeelingly given the intelligence amid business matters passes unheeded. Then the memories of old times steal upon him; he begins to describe his dead friend, and as he speaks his feelings assert themselves more; his voice falters; he remembers suddenly that he is not alone, tries to affect carelessness, and to hum his old fanfare with unmoved gaiety. But the first notes are choked in his throat, and he bursts into tears, overpowered with an emotion which his audience can hardly fail to share. To Balzac's *Mercadet*, in which part he succeeded Geoffroy, M. Got gives a self-confidence and self-possession which inspire in the spectator the belief which is necessary for his portentous feats. You cannot but admire the mind which is capable of conceiving such gigantic projects, of laying plans for victory when even escape seems hardly feasible, of darting from scheme to scheme with bewildering rapidity, and yet never being flurried. Running through the performance is a vein of irony which is not biting enough to prevent one's wishing for Mercadet's salvation by some such happy stroke of fortune as occurs in the return of the real Godeau when Mercadet has just resorted to the desperate device of employing a fictitious partner. For other specimens of M. Got's powers in different directions we may refer to the bourgeois father-in-law in *Le Gendre de M. Poirier*, whose very walk reveals much of his character and training, and in whose reply to the taunts of his noble son-in-law, brutal as it is, there is yet something dignified; and to the terribly grim humour of the jealous *podestat* Claudio in *Les Caprices de Marianne*. In his face and whole presence

throughout there is a griping joy in the consciousness of petty power, and even while he is ludicrously entangled in the train of his own robe he seems to walk in the shadow of the treacherous revenge he is plotting. For pure comedy M. Got's Figaro, which part he has of late years ceded to M. Coquelin, and for simple farce his valet, in various classical comedies, are admirable. His acting of Rémonin in Dumas's *L'Étrangère* was a wonderfully studied performance; and by his simplicity and dignity as Bernard in *Les Fourchambault* he produces a great impression, made by the highest, that is the least affected, art.

There is one peculiarity in M. Got's acting. He never seems to enter fully into a part when he undertakes it at first. On the first night of his playing a new character you may be disappointed at point after point which he seems to let slip, or to grasp ineffectually; it is as if he were feeling his way. After the first few performances he seizes the different ideas which appeared to elude him, and gives a rendering of character with which few actors can compete.

M. DELAUNAY.

M. Delaunay, who made his first appearance in 1846, at the Odéon, and two years later left that theatre for the Français, is perhaps the most finished actor of the modern stage. He has been often called « le premier des jeunes premiers » and this is no light compliment, for it is a difficult task to play one young hero of comedy and drama after another, and to make of each one a distinct and complete impersonation. But M. Delaunay

has done much more than this. For a long time past he has found opportunities for showing that he has passion and fire at his command as much as graceful liveliness and attractive sentiment; and lately in two parts, which used to belong to M. Bressant, he has proved that if he should ever cease to be young, which one can hardly believe, he will still have a wide range of characters before him.

To say that M. Delaunay is perhaps the first actor of the Comédie Française is to say that hard study and incessant devotion to his art have produced the singular ease and spontaneity which are seen in all his performances; but it is worth while to speak in some detail of the faults which he struggled with and overcame at the outset of his career, as no one seeing him now could suspect their former existence. The most remarkable physical advantage of the actor is his voice, a voice of unsurpassed melody and expression, which can be in turns gay, satirical, and tender, which can rise and fall on the swell of passion, can ring with light-hearted laughter, or seem to die away on the dirge of a dead love, or freeze to a horrified whisper that chills the blood, and never touch in all its infinite variety a note that is not musical. Yet it was this voice which was most in the way of the actor's success when he first entered his profession. The critics of his early appearances observed that but for the misfortune of his voice he might do great things. It was weak, and jarring by reason of being constantly pitched in a high monotonous key. Again, M. Delaunay's style is absolutely free from imitation of any other player; his bearing and gesture are always so natural that one can hardly point to any action as peculiar to him, unless it be an expressive one, which he often employs in passages of entreaty or remonstrance with both hands held

outwards. But like many good actors he has a singular talent for mimicry which at first was a stumbling-block to him. Constantly acting with M. Got, and admiring his fine perception and skill, he fell into a habit of imitating his style, and losing originality. The removal of both these defects was due in the first instance to M. Davesnes, sometime régisseur of the Français; but the suggestions of M. Davesnes could only by carried into effect by assiduous labour, by his pupil trying his voice every morning, developing new notes and rejecting bad ones, and keeping a careful watch over himself every night on the stage.

One of the gayest and most brilliant of M. Delaunay's impersonations is Dorante in *Le Menteur*, which Foote adapted for the English stage as *The Liar*. M. Delaunay's Dorante lies so brightly and naturally that one cannot be angry with him. He is overwhelmed with his romantic imagination. His mind is stored with brilliant fancy that must find expression. He cannot resist representing things not as they happened, but as in a fairy world they ought to have happened. His nature rejects the dull commonplace of this earth, and he walks lightly in some brighter atmosphere, with the warm tints of which he cannot help colouring the surroundings of his bodily prison-house. When indulgence of this tendency creates difficulties, and brings him face to face with the things of this world, far from being disappointed or perplexed, he finds a new joy in the call made on his invention, and delights in building his imaginary fabric higher and higher into the clouds, where reality cannot reach it to pull it down. It is impossible to attach any serious blame to a creature so airy, who laughs at indignation so carelessly and musically.

As the height of sparkling comedy is reached in *Le*

Menteur, so are the depths of passion sounded in *La Nuit d'Octobre*, a poem by Musset in the form of a dialogue between a poet and the Muse. In the desperate mourning of the poet over the lost brightness of his life, in his blasting denunciation of the woman who has been false to him, and his gradual yielding to the Muse's entreaties and consolations, Musset has expressed a phase in his own history, and to his vivid picture M. Delaunay, in his performance of the poet, gives a fresh life. His misery is so deadly that one feels only some supernatural vision can come between it and him his outbreak of passion at the memory of the woman who has fooled him is withering; when at last soothed by the Muse's comfort, he flings open his study window, resolved to take up again his work « aux premiers rayons du soleil, » a weight is taken from the spectator's mind.

We have selected these two from many of M. Delaunay's best-known performances, as affording a striking instance of the variety of his power. Lately he has discovered yet more versatility. His appearance as Ollivier in *Le Demi-Monde* set Paris wondering before the event if its favourite comedian could discharge his new task; and left it after the event admiring the ease with which he seemed to accomplish it. To our thinking it is far from his best part; the character is a disagreeable one, and seems to demand a certain cynicism which M. Delaunay does not give to it; he softens Ollivier's biting satire with a restless gaiety which hardly suits it. But on the other hand his liveliness gives a pleasant tone as far as may be to an unpleasant play; and his matchless elocution makes the longest speech pleasant to listen to. As Richelieu in *M^lle de Belle-Isle*, and Gaston in *Le Gendre de M. Poirier*, parts formerly filled by M. Bressant,

M. Delaunay has shown himself capable of filling the gap left by that great comedian's retirement. As Richelieu he is, as a Parisian critic said, less of a *grand seigneur*, and less brutal than his predecessor; and in Gaston de Presles, also, he brings emotion more into play than did M. Bressant. M. Bressant had a haughty insolence as Gaston; M. Delaunay has rather the playful impertinence of a man who is pleased with his wife for being loveable, though she is a *bourgeoise*, and with himself for loving her though he is a marquis. M. Bressant, when he broke into scorn of Poirier's pretentions, was loftily, impassively disdainful; M. Delaunay's contempt is mixed with good-natured amusement. Throughout he brings out Gaston's good qualities more fully than M. Bressant did.

Lately M. Delaunay has appeared as *Le Misantrope*. In this part his penetrating art is devoted to illustrating the manysided character of Alceste. He is by turns sarcastic, mournful, sardonically tragic, deeply pathetic, and in a certain sense gay. Every mood of the man's mind is rendered with a searching and unrivalled skill.

The perfection of truth and grace in voice and action which M. Delaunay exhibits in every part he plays is, as we have said, the result of hard study, though it appears the impulse of a moment; and hard study can do much to make an actor. But in cannot give him the command which M. Delaunay has over his audience's smiles and tears, unless he is born with the faculty for reaching their hearts.

Mlle SARAH BERNHARDT.

Mlle Sarah Bernhardt, like many other great actresses, failed to make any striking impression when she first appeared on the stage of the Français, whence she went to the Gymnase and the Odéon and returned ten years later to the Comédie, where since then she has gradually built up the great strength and reputation which she now possesses. She has learnt to use a musical and well-trained voice, an expressive face, and a marvellously graceful bearing with what even some years ago seemed little short of perfect art. But Mlle Bernhardt has that highest development of the artistic faculty which is never content with its own attainments, which is ever striving after something better than it has yet done, and ever surprising those who watch the unfolding of its resources. In 1873 she played Aricie to Mlle Rousseil's Phédre, with a depth of feeling, a truth and grace, that raised a character which might well appear insipid into beauty. From seeing this, however, one could hardly expect that two years later she would play Phédre with surpassing power. From the moment when she came on the stage, drooping and trembling as if scorched with the passion blazing within her to the conclusion of the tragedy, the spectator's thoughts were riveted on the queen. It was difficult to give any heed to the other characters, well as they were acted. She reminded one of Beckford's terrible description in 'Vathek' of the dead in the Hall of Eblis, each of whom carried within him a flaming heart. But they walked in gloomy silence, and her tortures drove her to uncontrollable speech. She looked, walked, and spoke as if she were consumed and yet

sustained by her madness, as if she drew her life from that which was destroying her. Her passion was so intense that it seemed to wither whatever came in its way; her grief so desperate that horror was lost in pity. Perhaps the finest passage in the performance was this in the third scene of the first act.

ŒNONE.

Aimez-vous?

PHÈDRE.

De l'amour j'ai toutes les fureurs.

ŒNONE.

Pour qui?

PHÈDRE.

Tu vas ouïr le comble des horreurs
J'aime . . A ce nom fatal, je tremble, je frissonne.
J'aime . .

ŒNONE.

Qui?

PHÈDRE.

Tu connais ce fils de l'Amazone.
Ce prince si longtemps par moi-même opprimé.

ŒNONE.

Hippolyte? Grands dieux!

PHÈDRE.

C'est toi qui l'as nommé!

The effect here is the more difficult on account of the gradual preparation for a revelation which to the spectator is no news. With each pause Mlle Bernhardt conveyed a greater sense of horror, and yet when the final confession came it struck and blasted the senses like lightning. The actress delivered the last words

with a terrible mixture of triumph and self-loathing. She spoke them with averted head and with a shrinking of the whole body; and still there was a kind of fierce joy in her self-condemnation, which one may compare to the delight of a fanatic in his self-inflicted martyrdoms.

The same actress who is overpoweringly tragic in *Phèdre* can be in Coppée's *Le Passant* as tender and winning as the « nuits d'été, » the beauty of which her Zanetto celebrates as he enters; or represent, as in *La Fille de Roland*, a simple dignity and a noble fire. In this play she gives expression with singular truth and pathos to the growth of a maiden love, and by her force elevates even to sublimity a somewhat bombastic tirade of which a portion falls to her. The actress has as complete a command of the lightest comedy as of grandeur and pathos. In a bright fantastic little piece by M. Ferrier, called *Chez l'Avocat*, she played a wife who unexpectedly met her husband in an avocat's office, whither they had each come to inquire about the possibility of a separation, and in this part her acting was singularly witty. The fineness of her insight, the grace of movement and speech with which she clothed it, would have given point to her dialogue even if of itself it had none. M^lle^ Sarah Bernhardt did very much for Dumas's *L'Etrangère*, in which, by her dramatic power and perfect elocution, which deals alike successfully with verse and prose, she gave life to an impossible character and saved a mercilessly long discourse from being tiresome. A critic, writing of her in this piece, said that she was the Cleopatra of the Français; and though in appearance the actress is as unlike Cleopatra as may be, it is easy to believe that age will never wither her, « nor custom stale her infinite variety. » Lately, as Dona Sol in *Hernani*, M^lle^ Bernhardt

has given fresh illustrations of her extraordinary power.

The word genius is far too loosely applied, as a rule, to those artists who are gifted with unusual talents; but we have little hesitation in asserting that true genius is possessed by M^lle^ Sarah Bernhardt.

M. MOUNET-SULLY.

M. Mounet-Sully is in some respects the most remarkable actor on the French stage; and when one considers the style of his master and his own, not the least remarkable thing about him is that he was a pupil of M. Bressant. M. Mounet-Sully seems to be the only living player capable of undertaking the tragic heroes, whether of the strictly classical or of the romantic drama. The manner in which he fills these parts is in various ways surprising; and the surprise is not confined to the spectators, as the player has acquired so little control over his emotions that he frequently yields in a performance to the impulse of a moment, and, inspired by this, occupies a position on the stage which is entirely different from that which he has taken at rehearsals. He has recognised the fact that to give expression to great passion an actor must by capable of comprehending it, and he has not sufficiently taken into account that this expression must be shaped according to certain rules which cannot be disregarded. M. Mounet-Sully is an actor who undoubtedly has true passion, in which respect he resembles Edmund Kean; but Kean always knew to a nicety what part of the

stage he would tread, and what inflection of voice he would use at every passionate outburst in his part. To judge how important an element in the actor's art system is, it is only necessary to imagine the effect of a play in which all the performers should disregard studied effects and vary the positions and actions they had tried at rehearsal, by every fresh suggestion which came into their minds when they were before an audience. The same place on the stage might as easily as not suddenly appear to everyone concerned in a scene as the most desirable one for him or her to occupy. There would be a hustling and confusion which might in one sense be strictly natural, but which would certainly not carry out the requirements of the theatre. On the stage, as, has been often said, things cannot be done exactly as they are in real life. The glare of the footlights would make Apollo look like a spectre if he refused to paint his face, and what is true of such a particular as this is necessarily true of the general principle to which it belongs. The impression of reality conveyed from the stage to the spectator is produced by a studied arrangement of artificial effects; and when this is disturbed, by the intrusion either of actual objects on the scene or of unstudied emotion in the player, the illusion must be hindered, not helped.

Most of M. Mounet-Sully's faults might be removed if he would consider more deeply the fact that the mirror of the stage must owe as much to mechanical skill and framing as mirrors do in everyday life. He has gifts physical and mental, which, properly used, might give him a position few actors have attained. He has a face and figure suitable for poetic action and expression, and a voice whose sonorous tones can strike any note in the scale of passion. He has also, as he has often shown even in performances disfigured by want of

application, that vastness of imagination which a tragedian ought to have : which can comprehend the poet's greatest thoughts, and carry them in their fulness to an audience that but for him they might never reach. But he squanders these precious gifts recklessly; he seems to be content with the mere possession of them, and to take not enough thought of how he can turn them to the best profit. He is at little pains to control or direct the passion he feels, and is therefore perhaps at his best when, as in the classical French tragedy, a constraint which he cannot break through is imposed by the author's measured diction. One of his finest performances is that of Hippolyte (in Racine's *Phèdre*) to whom he gives a marvellously truthful aspect of untamed nobility. His love for Aricie is the perfection of manly tenderness; and his repulsion of Phédre's passion is the utmost expression of a strong nature filled with horror at what is shameful, and yet careful, with the gentleness of strength, to wound as little as may be the object of its horror. The despairing cry with which he leaves Theseus after he has learnt that by no means but those he will not use he can establish his innocence strikes the hearer with admiration and pity.

In parts where the author has set less strict bounds to the player's expression, in such a part, for instance, as Gérald in M. de Bornier's *La fille de Roland*, M. Mounet-Sully is less fortunate. With much that one may admire—with such things as the fine rendering of his chivalrous devotion to Berthe, in which he seems to have caught the very spirit of the chivalrous age which the poet has aimed at reproducing, and the eloquent and imaginative delivery of the ballad about the two swords, Joyeuse and Durandal — there is also much to blame. The actor seems at times overcome

with the knowledge that he has certain advantages which it is his duty to employ. He rolls his eyes and displays his teeth, not only when the occasion demands some violence of emotion, but at many points where a more sedate demeanour would be desirable. There is one scene in the play which ends with Gérald mounting guard outside his father's castle, where Berthe is housed, and taking up the cry of « Veillez, » which, according to the author, should be heard passing from sentry to sentry as the curtain falls. As a matter of fact whether by M. Mounet-Sully's arrangement or the stage manager's, Gérald's cry alone was heard ; and the shout with which the actor delivered this became, at the time, almost proverbial. It never failed to arouse a murmur of laughter in the house, in spite of which M. Mounet-Sully never condescended to moderate the vigour of voice which he devoted to this word.

As Hernani M. Monnet-Sully has somewhat toned down his extravagances, and in many passages of the part displays the truest feeling.

It must be said, however, that while M. Mounet-Sully is often laughed at, he also attracts spectators ; and when all his faults have been told, the fact of which we have already spoken remains that he is the only actor who can fill with any success a certain line of characters, and that those characters are the most poetic of the French drama. It is perhaps unfortunate for him that this should be so ; a wholesome rivalry might stimulate him to better exertions, but as yet no rival has arisen. M. Mounet-Sully has twice appeared as a principal figure in modern drama, once in *Jean de Thommeray*, and lately as the lover in Dumas's *L'Etrangère*. Both of these parts might have puzzled a more experienced actor than M. Mounet-Sully ; but it was clear enough before he attempted them that his

qualities were not suited to the rendering of such characters, however well designed; and he will be wise if in future he avoids them, and devotes his energies to the study of the more poetic drama.

Mlle FAVART.

Mlle Favart, who, after her first appearance at the Français, left it for a smaller theatre, and returning to it a year later, became in due course one of its most distinguished members, has of late been somewhat hardly treated by critics. With the English public, a player who has once deservedly been a favourite can always count on finding a claim to applause acknowledged. The inevitable barriers raised by time between the spectator and the illusion desired on the stage are softened and shaded by the memory of former hours when the power that may now have lost something of its outward expression could lift an intent audience out of their individual cares and troubles, and carry them away on the flood of an exalted passion. This benevolence may doubtless be carried too far in encouraging actors to remain on the stage and encounter tasks for which they are, from physical causes, utterly disqualified; and the player who joins discretion to other merits will be careful, if possible, to give no opening for a statement that he has outstayed his welcome on the boards. But it is surely better that some indulgence should be extended to long-trusted servants of the public than that there should be a searching investigation and condemnation of their faults the moment that any di-

minution is perceived in their capacities. M^lle^ Favart has been indiscreet in showing some unwillingness to believe that any new talent can succeed her in the place where for long she reigned alone; she was unwise, for instance, in attempting to prove to an English audience that she could play the part in *Le Sphinx* in which M^lle^ Croizette was winning applause from the Parisians. But many of the qualities which M^lle^ Favart has possessed still exist, and require only to be used in the right direction. She has a strength in passionate outbursts which is unsurpassed, an ease and dignity of movement which exactly meet the requirements of parts where the comedy of drawing-rooms veils some tragic interest. She excels in the rendering of irony and contempt. Her commanding presence and incisive tones are capable of conveying a withering scorn. When in *L'Aventurière* she turns on those who are unmasking her plans, and ends a speech of bitter recrimination with, « Relevez donc les yeux, honnêtes gens ! » the words seem to cut as they fall from her lips. It is perhaps the consciousness of possessing this incisive power of speech which has betrayed M^lle^ Favard into a habit of dwelling too long on her words, so long, indeed, that it has been proposed to have an *ent'racte* between each of her utterances. The actress has, while acquiring this trick, exaggerated another which was always a blemish on her elocution; as if to make up for doling out the greater part of a speech like something too precious to be given out but with painful deliberation, she seems at its end to grow weary of her self-imposed task, and pours forth the words which remain with bewilderingly rapid generosity. Such defects as these do not injure M^lle^ Favart's remarkable power of byplay which enables her to convey in one look and gesture a whole history of suffering, passion, or re-

morse. And whatever faults may have been found either now or formerly with her method it should be remembered that Mlle Favart has performed no easy feat in filling with success parts associated with the name of Rachel.

One of Mlle Favart's most striking impersonations in the modern school of drama is Julie in M. Feuillet's play of that name. The piece, although its defects are in a maner concealed by the veil which M. Feuillet's grace and skill of writing throw over them, is radically false and vicious in tone. M. Feuillet has a singular aptitude for taking an ugly subject and glossing over its hideousness. It suits him to have a base motive for his work, but he is careful not to shock his own or his spectator's fine sensibilities by exhibiting his theme in its natural state. He wraps it round with artfully disposed gauzes of sentiment; he cloaks the vileness of adulterous passion with a pretence of unselfish devotion and compassion. But the disguise is a thin one, and only the art of such an actress as Mlle Favart can induce a spectator to sympathise with emotions that to a reader will appear untrue to nature as well as vicious. The part of Julie brought out Mlle Favart's various merits in a marked degree. The light dialogue of the first scene could not be more pleasantly and gracefully spoken than it was by her; and yet she showed the trouble in her heart all the while. She gave reality by the force of her expression and action to the unreal speech in which Julie gives herself up as lost for ever because her husband leaves her alone for a time. She softened in a marvellous way the repulsive rivalry between a mother and daughter; and the passion of the last act, which culminated in her death, was so powerful that the spectator could not but believe in the vain image set before him by the author. The death scene itself

was terrible and yet not revolting, because the actress subordinated the physical to the mental effect, and exhibited not a succession of contortions and writhings, carefully studied from the deathbeds of everyday occurrence, but the sudden agony and prostration of a frame worn to destruction by the passions contending within it.

Another part in which M^lle^ Favart has struck the keys of many emotions is Marianne, in Alfred de Musset's *Les Caprices de Marianne*. Here, in the dialogue with the reckless Octave, there is an opportunity for the expression of ironical contempt, which she uses to the utmost. As the action goes on you see her love for him growing by degrees, beneath the measured coldness of her manner. At the end when his dearest friend whose cause he has been pleading to her has been killed by her husband's assassins, Octave delivers a desperate farewell to all the sunlight and gaiety of his careless life. « Pourquoi dites-vous, Adieu l'Amour ? » asks Marianne, opening her arms towards him. « Je ne vous aime pas, Marianne. C'était Célio qui vous aimait, » replies Octave, with cold contempt. Upon this she sinks to her knees, and the curtain falls while she utters a heart-broken cry; and this cry, as M^lle^ Favart delivered it, rang through the house like a death-knell; it paralysed the attention so that one could scarce lift a hand to applaud the power that weighed one down with an imaginary horror.

In strong contrast to her rendering of passion is M^lle^ Favart's impersonation of the Muse in Musset's *La nuit d'Octobre*, who comes to cheer the sinking heart of the poet. To this she gives a statuesque stillness which has a strangely supernatural air; the words which she has to speak recognise the grief which she has come to console, and point to something higher

than individual misery where it may find relief; as she utters them they seem fraught with the still sadness of a summer evening, and the hope of the dawn that it contains.

In this part M^lle^ Favart is likely to be long without a rival; and there are many other parts which she might hold undisputed, and which give plenty of opportunity to a fine actress.

M. BRESSANT.

It has been our purpose to speak only of players actuelly upon the stage; but it is so short a while since M. Bressant retired, that we may be excused for attempting to recall some characteristics of one of the finest actors whom this generation has seen. M. Bressant was in parts which depended on the outward courtliness and dignity of the actor, as well as on his intellectual qualities, without a rival. As has been already observed M. Delaunay has proved that he is capable of filling the gap left by M. Bressant's retirement, but, with true artistic feeling, he has been careful, in the parts to which he has already succeeded, to avoid rather than challenge comparison with his predecessor. These parts have been open to slightly different interpretations, and M. Delaunay has given a touch of emotion where M. Bressant preserved impassiveness and been gay where he was cynical.

With a fine presence which seemed to command attention and enforce obedience without an effort, M. Bressant possessed in a marked degree all the resources of diction. These he employed with singular

power in Don Carlos's long soliloquy, which took a quarter of an hour to deliver in the fourth act of *Hernani*, and also in the speech which ends the act. The delivery of the two last lines —

> Je t'ai crié : Par où faut-il que je commence ?
> Et tu m'as répondu : Mon fils, par la clémence,

which the actor gave standing on the edge of Charlemagne's tomb, and gazing intently into it, could not have been surpassed in beauty. Throughout the part of Don Carlos M. Bressant's kingly bearing was admirable. There was no stilted stiffness in his demeanour but by a certain curtness of manner and indifference as to the effect of his words on the persons he addressed he conveyed the notion of a man so accustomed to profound deference that he never paused to see if it was yielded to him. In the first act, where Don Carlos saves Hernani by saying —

> C'est quelqu'un de ma suite,

M. Bressant spoke the words without even glancing at Hernani to see the impression they produced on him, as if it could never occur to Don Carlos to occupy himself for an instant with the emotions of a creature so far removed from him. Again, when Don Carlos falls into the power of Hernani, who says to him —

> Songes-tu que je te tiens encore ?
> Ne me rappelle pas, futur césar romain,
> Que je t'ai là, chétif et petit, dans ma main,
> Et que si je serrais cette main trop loyale,
> J'écraserais dans l'œuf ton aigle impériale !

to which Don Carlos merely answers, « Faites ! » the reply was given with such absolute indifference, and

yet with such dignity, that one felt the words « chétif et petit » to be an insult most trivial and out of place, and that it could not be possible for Hernani to lay hands on a being so supreme as Don Carlos.

As Octave in Musset's *Les Caprices de Marianne*, M. Bressant displayed something of the same careless and graceful gaiety which made his Almaviva an admirable perfomance; but while Almaviva's gaiety was purely natural, one saw that Octave's was a matter of habit rather than impulse, and that the words he says of himself, « Ma gaieté n'est qu'un masque. Mon cœur est plus vieux qu'elle, » were true. The swing of enjoyment with which he delivered the speech in praise of wine in the second act was real, but it was the deliberate expression of a feeling deliberately sought. Even when he was most carried away by the emotion he had roused in himself, and ended a poetical address to the bottle with « Je ne puis vous le cacher ! Elle a failli passer toute entière sur mes lèvres dans la chaleur de son premier baiser, » there was a savour of bitter irony in his utterance. All through the part, as well at his wildest as at his most cynical moments, one felt that Octave's reckless existence was overshadowed by the thought of what he might have been. His grief for the death of Célio, the friend on whom all the best feelings of his nature are centred, and who inevitably suspects him of treachery at the moment of his death, was infinitely saddening; and the pitying contempt with which he rejected Marianne's proffered love was crushing in its coldness and impassiveness.

An impersonation equally perfect of another kind of rake was given by M. Bressant as Don Fabrice in *L'Aventurière*. Here the trials and struggles of the man's early life have resulted in a sombre gravity instead of a wild gaiety. His feelings are constantly re-

pressed beneath an aspect of stern stillness, but he who looks can see that the mind within is restless, though the features are forbidden to betray it. To convey this impression, as M. Bressant undoubtedly did convey it, is perhaps more difficult than to suggest the passion that works beneath Octave's antic humour.

M. Bressant has not only been a fine actor himself: he has been the cause of fine acting in others. Some of the best players now at the Français have been his pupils, and his name will be remembered with honour as long as the stage of the Comédie exists.

Mlle CROIZETTE.

Mlle Croizette, who first studied her art in M. Bressant's class at the Conservatoire, made her first appearance at the Théâtre Français, in the *Verre d'Eau* in 1870. Since that time she has appeared in various parts of different calibre, but it was only three years later that she found a good opportunity for showing how great a talent she possessed. The piece which furnished this occasion was not of any great importance; it was a clever and graceful comedy in one act, by Meilhac and Halévy, called *L'Eté de la Saint-Martin*. The piece turned upon a young wife gradually making her way to the heart of her husband's uncle, to whom she presented herself in the character of a reader. The curtain rose and fell to her reading out the same passage in 'Les Trois Mousquetaires.' The action, meanwhile, was occupied with the yielding of the uncle to her fascination, which indeed she carried

too far, as, ignorant that she was his nephew's wife, he suddenly proposed to her himself. Of course all was happily arranged at the end of the piece, which depended for its success less upon its skilful writing than the admirable playing of M. Thiron and M^lle Croizette. The actress had here no scope for the passion which she has since shown herself capable of commanding, but there was a singular charm in the airs and graces with which she dazzled the uncle. There was nothing very much in the part, but it was rendered with such truth, and there was something so striking in the actress's peculiar irregular beauty, that the audience were as completely fascinated as the uncle. A greater success in one sense was made by M^lle Croizette's performance of M^me de Chelles in *Le Sphinx*. But the success here was due to the discussion which naturally followed the hideously realistic rendering of the death-scene. The thing was done with wonderful art and force, but it was a thing which would have been better left undone. The representation of merely physical horrors upon the stage is, from every point of view, unadvisable. If a death-scene is to be represented, the player should indicate the mental rather than the bodily disturbance of the sufferer. His face may present the struggle which he makes with his agony, and so inspire terror or pity in his audience; but when he descends to mere contortions of the visage and writhings of the limbs he will be in danger of suggesting nothing but disgust. Besides, once the attempt is made to represent the hideous side of life or death upon the stage with absolute accuracy, the representation should, to be artistic, be carried out in full detail. This is obviously impossible to the most daring player, and the result is that "realistic" scenes of death or murder are not only revolting but also untrue. However, M^lle Croizette's death-scene

was talked about, and attracted general attention to her and since the performance of *Le Sphinx* she has been recognised definitely as one of the leading actresses at the Français. She has been seen perhaps at her best in Dumas's *Le Demi-Monde* and *L'Etrangère*. In the former she represented Susanne D'Ange, a scheming woman whose hand is against everyone, with a remarkable force. There was a fire in her passion, a depth in her despair, which commanded the spectator's sympathy in spite of himself. In *L'Etrangère* she plays the wife of the well born ruffian, De Septmonts, and in the scene where she turns upon him and crushes him with well-merited reproaches the actress reaches a high level of passion and art. Her voice and face quiver with shame and scorn, and in the midst of her excitement she preserves an air of command which takes away all fear that de Septmonts will carry out his momentary intention of striking her. It may be objected that this imposing presence might not be natural to the daughter of old Mauriceau, and the only answer that can be found is that it seems to be natural to M^lle^ Croizette.

M^lle^ Croizette has been less fortunate in the plays of Musset than in those of Dumas; she seems able to conceive and to render a broadly marked character with great force, but it is the force of a sudden blow, not of the delicate perception and patient labour which are necessary to the interpretation of every line that Musset wrote.

M. FEBVRE.

M. Frédéric Febvre, whose first dramatic appearances were made at Havre, went from theatre to theatre for some time in Paris, until he made his first successes at the Odéon, of which the most notable was his representation of Célestin in the *Testament de César Girardot*. But he obtained later a more complete success at the Vaudeville, whence several years ago he went to the Comédie Française, of which he became a sociétaire in less than a year. M. Febvre, has the natural advantages of a good presence and a resonant voice; unlike most members of the Comédie Française, he had, at the early part of his career, no better training than can be got from practice on the stage and self teaching. He has in this way learnt the science of the stage, as far as gesture and movement go, to perfection; and he excels in the art of wearing the outward appearance in face and costume of whatever personage he represents. He is capable of assuming something of the repose and dignity of manner of which we have spoken as belonging peculiarly to M. Bressant, and he is no doubt the actor at the Français to whom M. Bressant's heavier parts naturally descend. One of these, St. Géran, in *Une Chaîne*, M. Febvre played with marked success a year or two ago, giving to the figure of the retired admiral an excellent air of dignity and command. One of M. Febvre's best parts has been that of De Turgy, which he filled when *Julie* was first produced. It is no easy task to invest the figure of a middle-aged man who is the hero of an illicit passion with interest. M. Febvre succeeded, however, in giving to this character, for whom, when one reads the play

one can have little liking or respect, a certain air of chivalry which for the moment imposed upon one's judgment. The passion of the character is throughout repressed, and for that reason the actor was seen at his best in representing it. For, although M. Febvre's experience and perceptions prevent him from failing in any character he undertakes, the one striking defect of his acting interferes with his success in parts where anything like a flow of passionate utterance is required. This defect, which an early course at the Conservatoire would probably have removed, but which is now past curing, is an indistinctness of speech which makes it difficult even for French ears at times to hear what he says. But for this fault M. Febvre's impersonation of the American Clarkson in *L'Etrangère* would be throughout admirable. The actor's dress, face, and manner in this part are alike true to nature; and much of the success of the last act is due to M. Febvre's playing in the scene with De Septmonts. As he listens to the Duke's infamous propositions, his manner grows gradually more and more intent, and his expression more and more scornful, until at last he almost breaks through his habitual coolness to tell De Septmonts what a scoundrel he thinks him.

One of M. Febvre's most satisfactory performances was that of the hero of *L'Ami Fritz* in which he toned down with singular skill the repulsive quality which as a matter of fact belongs to the character.

Mlle REICHEMBERG.

There is a type of character which, being peculiar to the French stage, is always called by its French description, *l'ingénue*. This kind of young woman is capable of being horribly tiresome. She has been worked to death by fourth rate dramatists. She appears with an apron of clear and spotless muslin, with her hair arranged in a childish fashion, with a bouquet in her hand, and with her arms bare. Her employment is to diffuse brightness and purity around her. She finds her mother bathed in tears, plunged in sombre thoughts and presentiments; she skips up to her with aggravating childishness, « Pourquoi pleures-tu, maman? Regarde donc ces jolies fleurs, » she says, and the mother, observing that one must not trouble this young life with the secrets that burden her, gives a profound sigh, wipes away her tears, and assumes a terrible smile of gaiety. She meets a villain, bent on atrocious crime, and, by saying « Good-day » to him, convinces him of the error of his ways, and fills him with repentance. The most shameless libertines are abashed when she remarks that it is a fine day. One has grown so tired of the *ingénue* and her stereotyped attributes that even when the character is handled by first-rate playwrights there is danger of its producing an irritating effect. There are actresses whose gifts and accomplishments enable them to avoid this danger, and among them Mlle Reichemberg holds a high place. With a bearing that has a natural quality of distinction, and the grace that fine training gives, a voice that is tender and penetrating, and can take infantine tones without being exaggerated or ridiculous, Mlle Reichem-

berg possesses a distinct power of personation, and can be much more than merely young and artless. Her Agnes, in *L'Ecole des Femmes*, is a charming piece of puritanism; her usual light manner is put aside; she is delightfully stiff, bewitchingly prudish. Her Rosette in *On ne badine pas avec l'amour*, is as tender as her Agnes is restrained. She follows every movement of the young Seigneur Perdican with eyes that are devout in their affection; by the intensity of her innocent love she unfolds to her audience the passionate story which Musset reveals as if by a flash of lightning. At the moment when she relinquishes the hope of her marriage, her grief is so deep, so fixed, so penetrating, that her death, which is the sudden catastrophe of the play, seems its only possible conclusion.

In *La joie fait peur*, where M^lle^ Reichemberg plays the daughter of the house, first mourning her brother's death, then rejoicing in his return, all the actress's most winning qualities are displayed. The change from tender dejection to the play of happiness more natural to her youth and disposition is given with exquisite skill. Her languid steps become light, her voice takes a clearer ring; afraid of startling her mother by too sudden a joy, she seeks to command her growing smiles, but her movements betray her; she seems to float in happiness like a butterfly fluttering from darkness into sunshine. There is a quality of truth and tenderness in her acting which makes the expression of her new joy as touching as that of her grief at first.

M. THIRON.

M. Thiron fulfils the province of playing old men, uncles, fathers, and would-be lovers with singular success. In comedy of all times and nations, from Terence to Dumas, there is a certain stereotyped air about the angry old man who becomes softened at the sight of his young relations' trouble or happiness; the soft-hearted old man who becomes angry at their perversity; the cheerful old man who has always a bag of gold ready for a scapegrace young dog of a nephew; and the amorous old man who always resigns his suit with a half laugh and half-sigh when he finds that the same young dog is his rival. It is M. Thiron's merit to keep out of sight the strings which pull these puppets, as it is M^lle^ Reichemberg's to give individuality to the *ingénues* whom she represents. M. Thiron's perfomance of the old gentleman in *L'Eté de la Saint-Martin*, of which play we have already spoken, was an admirable instance of fine perception and equally fine execution. He saved the tolerably well-worn situation of an old man falling more and more in love with a young girl from any touch of commonplace; he even raised the representation to pathos not less when the progress of his autumn passion was being observed than when his goodness of heart asserted itself in forgiveness of the young couple who had in all innocence deceived him and in a renunciation of all but a fatherly love. And with a rare art the pathos was subdued throughout to that gentleness which is becoming to comedy; its sadness was no greater than that caused by a cloud passing for a moment across the sun. The same light handling is yet more valuable in *L'Etrangère*,

where M. Thiron has to fill in Mauriceau a part written with a more incisive and heavier pen than that of MM. Meilhac and Halévy. In a play of which the incidents are saved from appearing impossible as much by the actor's skill as by the author's knowledge of stage requirements, in which one of the least dishonest and morally inverted characters is the *vibrion*, whom the author denounces as a pestilent vermin to be removed at the right time by Providence (under the kind superintendence of M. Alexandre Dumas), Mauriceau figures as a retired trader who, for the sake of this *vibrion's* title, has sold his daughter to him, well knowing his character. But there are certain things which even Mauriceau's love for the noblesse cannot induce him to support, and at a crisis he offers himself as the second of his son-in-law's challenger, who is also his daughter's lover. The position is no doubt distressing; but knowing that Mauriceau brought about the marriage, with his eyes wide open, one would not perhaps pity him much but for the delicate and forcible acting of M. Thiron, who, though he represents Mauriceau throughout as nothing more or less than a *bon bourgeois*, more than passably stupid in all things outside his business, succeeds at this point in carrying his audience into complete sympathy with the suffering for which he has himself to thank.

M. Thiron's representation of Van Buck, the affectionate opinionated choleric uncle, in Musset's *Il ne faut jurer de rien*, is in its way perfect. He makes you feel the regard which the nephew has for him even while he is vexed and amused at his tyrannical obstinacy.

The actor's weak point is discovered when he attempts a part where a high-bred dignity of demeanour and speech is needed; and for this reason his perfor-

mance of the Marquis in *Le Demi Monde* was not satisfactory; but in the lamented absence of M. Bressant, the part was perhaps most safely entrusted to M. Thiron, who is at least certain of doing everything he undertakes with discretion. On the other hand M. Thiron's performance of the vulgar Baron in *Les Fourchambault* is altogether admirable.

M. COQUELIN.

It would be unjust to say that M. Coquelin is unrivalled in a certain line of parts, for the expression would not give an adequate idea of the variety displayed by an actor who can command laughter with broad farce, draw tears by deep pathos, and handle with a fine skill such disagreeable figures in comedy as Don Annibal in *L'Aventurière*, or the Duc de Septmonts in *L'Etrangère*. M. Coquelin was a pupil of M. Regnier, to many of whose parts he has succeeded, and he could hardly have had a better master; but M. Coquelin is in this sense a born comedian, that it is difficult to imagine his ever having followed any career but that of an actor. No one could look at his face and not be struck by its intense humour and mobility; and, according to report, it was an amateur performance at Boulogne, where M. Coquelin began life not as an actor, that opened to him the course he has successfully pursued.

The extraordinary comic powers of M. Coquelin's face and voice, his untiring energy, and complete appreciation of pure fun, are seen unadulterated in the lying

valets of classical comedy, unreal creatures who, in M. Coquelin's hands, assume a reality that the most imaginative reader can hardly give to them. It is an old saying that humour and sadness are nearly allied and it often happens that actors with M. Coquelin's capacity for catching the essence of humour and communicating it to an audience are gifted also with a feeling for the deeper and more tender aspects of character. It is not always the case, however, that they can convey their tears as well as they can their laughter from the stage to the spectators; and one need not go back to Liston for instances of players who, filled themselves with pathetic impulses, cannot excite the listening crowd to anything but amusement. M. Coquelin, however, can impress an audience with sadness as well as with mirth. This power is seen in a marked degree when he plays Gringoire in the piece of that name. Here M. Coquelin represents an ugly, wretched-looking being, whose occupation is professedly that of a kind of buffoon, but who has a poet's instincts and a poet's heart. This strange figure has a curious fascination; he attracts the attention at first by his very oddness, and by some hardly expressed indication that he is not quite what he seems at first sight; then suddenly he reveals himself and shows you the noble feeling beneath his quaint appearance. In a speech of some length, he describes what he imagines, or rather what he feels, a poet to be; as he speaks, the actor's voice rings with a new tenderness, his face takes a new expression of mingled exultation and sadness; a sense of beauty and of fiery passion pierces through the ungainly mask which nature and circumstance have compelled the unknown poet to wear.

A part of greater length than Gringoire, composed diversely of tragic and comic feelings, was attempted

by M. Coquelin in *Tabarin*, and it was perhaps more the fault of the author than the actor that the play had no permanent success. The most striking scene in the piece was the last, in which Tabarin, while going through his buffooneries in the play within the play, learns that his wife, a beautiful actress, who is the curse and the idol of his life, has run away with a young student. His despair is terrible; the mimic audience, taking it for part of the show, applaud vociferously for a time, but presently get wearied, and hiss. Then Tabarin turns on them, and crushes them with his scorn. « Is a player, » he cries, « to have no human feelings? Is he the mere toy of a senseless crowd? What will you command me? Shall I cry; shall I dance; shall I laugh? » And he does laugh, madly and bitterly — a laugh that is discordant with despair. The public is exasperated; a riot seems imminent, when the wife suddenly comes back, and Tabarin, resuming his farcical manner, turns again on the audience, and asks them how they could be such fools as not to see that he was playing a joke on them. The rapid changes from one form of complicated excitement to another were given at this point with force and with an absolute air of nature by the actor, who, in other parts of the play was less successful, perhaps because less well fitted with the part.

M. Coquelin's pathetic powers are seen with less disadvantage to counterbalance them in Manuel's pretty piece called *Les Ouvriers*. When the young artisan Marcel, in despair at the apparently hopeless misery of those he loves, sits down and weeps, it is difficult to remain unmoved. As the Duc de Septmonts in *L'Etrangère* M. Coquelin performs the difficult task of representing a man whose nature is so corrupt and ruffianly that he has lost all sense even of the honour current

among thieves, but is cased in all the inherited traditions of good society. He has a contented composure, an unassertive insolence, that are kept up from beginning to end. In the last scene, Clarkson, the American, who has undertaken to be his second in a duel, on hearing the facts of the case, denounces the Duke in no measured terms as a rogue and a ruffian. The vacuous astonishment with which the Duke listens and says, struggling against the dumbness of amazement, « C'est — c'est à moi que vous parlez ? « is almost sublime.

M. Coquelin's besetting sin is a tendency to exaggeration. It is the danger no doubt of his great powers in broad fun that they sometimes tempt him to turn fine comedy into mere farce. This was seen when he took M. Regnier's old part of Balandard the *avoué* in Scribe's *Une chaîne*. While the play went on, it was impossible not to laugh ; but the amusement did not extend over one's after reflections. By their light one saw the mistake which the actor had made, and that the set of people represented by Scribe would never have given their confidence to such an extravagant being as M. Coquelin made of Balandard.

Mlle JOUASSAIN.

Mlle Jouassain, while yet quite young, employed herself in the representation, in which she is unrivalled of old ladies. It requires, one would think, a greater devotion to art to play with admirable purpose and finish part after part which is the object of a pleasant

ridicule than it does to figure as the queen of tragedy or the heroine of intrigue. Mlle Jouassain, however, has always approached her task with complete readiness, and by her singular intelligence and power of execution has both made for herself an unique reputation and gained from her audiences the same goodwill and appreciation which she has brought to the rendering of every part she has undertaken. This actress has a certain attractive quaintness of manner which inspires a liking in the spectator for the old women whom she presents to him, even when there is nothing particularly attractive in their character.

Most people know how charming an old lady in private life can be when with the dignity of years she preserves a youthful power of sympathy. When Mlle Jouassain has such a character as this to deal with, she gives it its full value, and thus her performance of Célio's mother in *Les Caprices de Marianne*, was, in spite of her brief appearance, a thing which dwelt upon the memory. Her aspect, her movements, the tone of her voice, had in them a kindness and sadness which touched the heart.

In contrast to this was Mlle Jouassain's performance of Mme Pluche in *On ne badine pas avec l'amour*. Here the actress did not flinch from giving due emphasis to the disagreeable nature of the woman whom she had to portray, while yet there was some indefinable quality in her acting that prevented one from entertaining any unkind recollection of the stiff, ridiculous duenua.

The two parts of which we have spoken are Musset's creations; but Mlle Jouassain's excellence of style and diction are seen to equal advantage in the comedies of Molière.

M. BARRÉ. — M. GARRAUD. — M. BOUCHER.

M. Barré, who a few years ago was elected a *sociétaire* of the Français, trod many stages before he arrived at that of the Odéon, whence he passed to the Français, where twenty years ago he made his first appearance as Pierrot in *Don Juan*. Since that time his career has been one of unfailing industry directed by considerable intelligence. His talent has none of the brilliant qualities which can ensure a striking success, but he has never neglected or failed to do justice to any part with which he has been intrusted. He has played in his time many parts which are none the less important for their having no very salient points. To none of them has he ever tried to give spurious prominence, and he has never failed to give to any of them its due weight. After one has seen a piece played with finish and completeness, in which he has taken a part, his name does not perhaps rise immediately in one's mind; but after reflection always shows how valuable his careful, sensible, and unobtrusive art has been. When the Comédie was over in London, M. Barré filled several parts, which are now usually given to M. Thiron, and filled them with excellent success. His services have been of more worth to the theatre than those of some actors, who, with more brilliancy, cannot be so surely relied on; and his election as a *sociétaire* was a becoming and graceful recognition of what he has done in a long career of sincere devotion to his art.

M. Garraud belongs in a sense to the same category as M. Barré—that is, he is an eminently useful actor, one who has at a need taken the place of M. Delaunay and M. Bressant. But with the same willingness to

give what is in him that marks M. Barré, he has less to give. There is a certain heaviness in his method, which, in many small parts, is of little importance, but in larger ones tells much against the player's good intentions. M. Garraud has little of M. Barré's discretion in handling a part: he seems always anxious to prove to his audience that he understands his author's meaning; and his anxiety leads him to give an undue emphasis to what he does. He seems so fearful lest anyone should fail to perceive his intelligence and skill that he ends in acting as a kind of unnecessary chorus to himself. He is, however, in respect of the care which he gives to all his undertakings, an actor whom the company could ill afford to lose.

M. Boucher is an actor who, some few years ago, was a young man of singular promise; and such he has remained ever since. With every natural gift, with excellent training, with a knowledge of how to move well and how to speak well, both in verse and prose, he has never chosen to improve his great opportunities. He has neglected the one thing needful—work; and the consequence is that, while certain advantages which he at first had are naturally on the wane, he has gained nothing to make up for their decrease. A certain constraint and want of life in his acting might some while ago have been taken to be a result of timidity or imperfect experience, which would in time be overcome by natural talent and study; seeing that these qualities exist to precisely the same extent in the actor's performances now, one can hardly hope to see them removed. M. Boucher a few years ago was the only very young actor of any promise at the Français; if he does not fulfil the hopes formely entertained of him, it will be his own fault.

M. MAUBANT.

M. Maubant is the very incarnation of classical drama. In 1841 he made his first appearance at the Français, as Achilles, in *Iphigénie*. He went after this to the Odéon for some time, and having returned to the Français in 1845 he was elected a *sociétaire* in 1852. M. Maubant has every quality that is requisite for the interpretation of the parts with which his name is associated. His fine presence, telling voice, and dignified gesture, give a weight that avoids oppression to the severe figures of tragedy which he is generally called on to represent. He is perhaps wanting in creative power, but the fathers of classical drama do not give much scope for anything beyond traditional excellence. M. Maubant's diction and power of repose are admirable in such parts as that of Thésée in *Phèdre*; and he is no less successful in the *pères nobles* of classical comedy. His representation of the father in *Le Menteur* is a singularly dignified and finished performance; and in a piece of the modern school, M. Manuel's *Les Ouvriers*, he presents the figure of a hard man of business troubled by a secret remorse with striking force. One of M. Maubant's finest characters is that of Charlemagne, in *La Fille de Roland*. To this he gave an aspect of commanding yet sorrowful majesty; his face his voice, his gestures, seemed charged with the memory of past glory and with the expectation of death.

M. PRUDHON. — M. LAROCHE.

M. Prudhon, in spite of having been a pupil in M. Regnier's class at the Conservatoire, and having played at the Français ever since 1865, is one of the least competent actors whom one can hope to see. His singular stiffness and ungracious aspect one could more easily get over if they were not accompanied by an obtrusive air of self-importance and confidence. M. Prudhon has seldom played a part of the first rank; he is generally cast for secondary characters which, for some unexplained reason, are usually high-bred gentlemen. To these personages M. Prudhon imparts a marvellous deal of offence; the dull heaviness of his face and bearing is carried on in his voice; he is stupidly familiar where he should be attractively easy, and he delivers speeches of graceful gallantry so that they sound like ill-directed insolences. And through all that he does he preserves the injured air of a man who was made for better things.

M. Laroche, an actor of considerable talent and versatility, who constantly improves, began his career in 1862 at the Français, which he left for the Vaudeville the Odéon, and the Gaieté, to return to it in 1870. He has played such parts as Nero in *Britannicus*, and Alceste in the *Misanthrope*, not with any striking success, but with a becoming avoidance of failure. As Maurice de Saxe in *Adrienne Lecouvreur*, an old part of M. Bressant's, which he played a year or two ago with M^lle^ Favart. he made a great advance upon what he had done before. Grace of manner and diction he has always had, but here he displayed a passion and

dignity which took one by surprise. His last scene with Adrienne, where, by a violent effort of his own will, he commands hers, so as to drag her for a brief moment out of the bewildering influence of the poison that has seized her, was full of intensity. He made a greater success than this as Ragenhardt, the Saxon captive, in *La Fille de Roland*. To this cabined warrior's wild and gloomy figure he gave a singular reality and his speech of defiance had all the nobility of an untamed spirit struggling with its bonds. About his first appearance in this part, M. Mortier, the clever Monsieur de L'Orchestre of the Figaro, invented an amusing anecdote. At the last moment before the curtain went up, it was discovered that the Saxon soldier's long flaxen wig was missing. Every one was in despair. Suddenly the stage manager was inspired. « Fetch the wig which M^lle^ Croizette wore as Baronette, » he cried and every one breathed again as the *cocotte's* tresses were fastened under the warrior's helmet. M. Laroche frequently appears in the part of a light-hearted and well-bred young man. He moves well and speaks well but he wants gaiety, and would succeed better if he could rid himself of a crooked and sickly smile which he employs to suggest it.

M^me^ TREBELLI.

There are those who think that the operatic differs so far from the ordinary stage that no singer ought to be called, in the true sense of the word, an actor. Accomplished comedians, both of this and of the last

generation, have been heard to say, that any singer of moderate intelligence can persuade the public he is a fine actor, while he is really nothing of the sort; that with the assistance of the music it is easy enough to make such imposing gestures, and to walk the stage with such an imposing air, as to convince the spectators that they are witnessing an admirable dramatic performance, while in fact they are looking at the empty movements of a puppet. No doubt there is a difference between operatic and ordinary acting; the emotions in opera are expressed more slowly than in a play; the feeling which the actor exhibits in a few fiery words, the singer is often compelled to spread over several bars of music; and this difference, it would seem, is not altogether advantageous to the singer. If from the fact that the singer's changes of expression and action are less rapid than the player's, it results that there is a less continuous strain upon his resources, it follows also that the spectator has fuller opportunities of observing any defect in the dramatic interpretation. Considering how many operas there are which depend as much upon acting as upon singing for their full success, and how many singers there have been who have owed their reputation as much to dramatic as to musical force, it might seem idle to insist upon the fact that operatic singers may lay claim to the highest consideration as actors. This however, has been often denied by persons of some authority in dramatic matters, and it has therefore seemed worth while to say these few words, by way of preface to considering the performances of two distinguished singers from a purely dramatic point of view. There are other operatic singers who also possess great dramatic excellence, but our concern is with French players only; and it will hardly be doubted that Mme Trebelli and M. Faure

are the finest French representatives of lyrical drama who are now heard in London.

Both M^me^ Trebelli and M. Faure have carried the faculty of impersonation to something near perfection. Both have the power of marking distinctly every character they undertake, with but little assistance from the art of disguise. M^me^ Trebelli's range of characters is necessarily more limited than M. Faure's, and between the boy's parts which she usually plays there is a kind of family resemblance which must add to the difficulty of giving, as she does, to each one a distinct individuality. Maffio Orsini, Siebel, Urbano, Arsace are every one shown to us as real and living persons, whose different characters are indicated, not only by skilful touches of detailed execution, but by some intangible quality in the very aspect of the actress as she comes upon the stage. The tenderness and poetry of a boyish love have never been better represented than in M^me^ Trebelli's Siebel; and the sentiment is well relieved by the gaiety conveyed by means of by-play, in the early part of the Kermesse scene, and the joyousness expressed in the garden scene, at finding that holy water breaks the evil spell laid on the flowers. The actress's Urbano, in the *Huguenots*, is as perfect a representation of the purely gay and somewhat mischievous side of boyhood as her Siebel in *Faust* is of its more impassioned aspect. There is a careless merriment in every gesture, every look of the brilliant page, who, with all his laughing impudence, preserves from first to last the courtly gentleness that should belong to a queen's attendant. Maffio Orsini, in *Lucrezia Borgia*, is so like in character to Urbano that it is difficult to define the difference between the two persons indicated by the actress. But a difference is undoubtedly shown, and it consists, per-

haps, in the greater freedom which Orsini's position gives him. Arsace, again, in *Semiramide*, is apart from all of these characters. To him are given the fire of a young warrior flushed with triumph, the dignity of a prince loaded with honours. And here there is a tragic element that is not found in the other characters we have spoken of. The amazement, the shame, the love, full of pity and forgiveness, which succeed each other or meet together in Arsace's mind during the great scene with Semiramide, are rendered by the actress with the utmost force ; and the defiance of the villainous Assur, in the earlier part of the opera, raises the emotions of suspicion and hatred to grandeur. Cherubino is considered, from a dramatic point of view, one of M^me Trebelli's finest assumptions. A singular charm is given to the petulant tricks of the spoilt boy ; and the awkwardness with which he wears his woman's disguise is indicated with a wonderfully light and truthful touch.

M^me Trebelli is no less successful when she has to play women's parts. Her Azucena in the *Trovatore* has long been noted for its wild and penetrating pathos; and her performance of Zerlina in *Don Giovanni* is the perfection of rustic coquetry.

M. FAURE.

It is a rare thing to find the perfect cultivation of two arts allied in one exponent of the musician's and the playwright's thoughts. Ronconi, according to all accounts, made up by the power of his acting for deficiencies in the vocal part of his performances; Giuglini, with a voice of wonderful sweetness and a perfect method, possessed a mind which could receive no ideas on the subject of acting; Signor Mario, who began by being a poor actor, ended by becoming one of consummate skill. Now that he has retired, there are few operatic singers on the London stage who both sing and act with any marked merit, and there are certainly none who equal M. Faure in excellence. Of M. Faure's singing it is not our present province to speak, but we have little hesitation in asserting that he is one of the most varied as also one of the strongest actors of the present day. M. Faure has the natural advantage of a fine presence, but there are many actors who have been treated with equal kindness in this respect by the great goddess Chance, and have failed to make a proper use of that kindness. This actor is the only one who has that majestic bearing, that air of dignity inseparable from himself which distinguished M. Bressant in every part he undertook. M. Bressant, however, with all his merits, of which we have before tried to make some recognition, was apt to rely too much upon the mere force of his presence. He seemed to know that if from fatigue or disinclination he wished to slur over any portion of his part he might safely do so, trusting to his grand manner to convince his au-

dience that his words and actions had been admirable. M. Faure might easily enough rely in like manner upon his personal influence to carry him through any ungrateful or tiresome piece of work; but he is too complete an actor to do so. Of whatever personage he is representing he never forgets the characteristics; he never for a moment puts forward the man to supply the deficiency of the actor. And to the variety of personages to whom he can give a distinct life it would be difficult to put a limit. One who can play Pietro in the *Etoile du Nord* and Figaro in *Le Nozze* with equal merit, though not from the nature of the parts with an equally striking appeal to an audience, is obviously no ordinary actor.

Pietro is in this way the most difficult in M. Faure's long list of successful parts that to produce the desired effect upon the spectators the actor must be at once brutal and royal, degraded and noble. He must make you respect a man who in a moment of mad passion threatens a woman with uplifted hand, and who, while waiting an event upon which his life and the welfare of a vast nation depend, seeks distraction, not as Hamlet did while expecting the ghost, in trivial talk, raised to importance by its bitter irony, but in a gross and deliberate bout of drunkenness. Scribe, who wrote the book of the opera, knew well what a dramatic effect might be got from violent contrasts; and knew no doubt how striking, in the hands of an intelligent actor, might be the Czar's sudden recovery by an effort of will from his drunken fit and subsequent avowal of his identity to the soldiery, who, occupied with plots for his murder, can find nothing to do but to fall on their knees with blind and absolute devotion when he reveals himself. But Scribe can hardly have foreseen the strength and delicacy which M. Faure brings to

the interpretation of this scene, as to that of the whole character. Through every phase of sullen wrath or unbridled fury in the earlier scenes, M. Faure, while he gives full force to the animal side of Peter, gives also and constantly an impression of nobility. In the tent scene, though he represents every stage of increasing drunkenness with absolute fidelity, he is never without dignity; and when he commands his senses to return to him one feels as much pity for him as for the devoted girl whom he thinks he has, in his intoxication, doomed to death. His revelation of himself to the disaffected troops which immediately follows this is the type of grandeur and courage, as his lament for Catherine, in the last act, is the essence of tenderness.

Mephistopheles is the part in which, perhaps, M. Faure is best known and most popular; and his acting of it is, in this respect, more remarkable than that of Pietro, that in the one case he raises Scribe's hero from the regions of startling melodrama to those of actual and commanding life: in the other he triumphs over the blunders of the French adapters, and restores Gœthe's fiend, in spite of them, to his proper place. With some actors Mephistopheles is the roistering grotesque devil of a mystery, with others he is a pleasant gentleman, masquerading as a demon; with M. Faure he is the exact embodiment of the spirit who denies—to whom

> everything
> Is only good for perishing.

Every action, every look, seems instinct with the love of destruction. Yet on the surface of the character there plays constantly a gaiety which seems to be partly assumed and to spring partly from the real

enjoyment which the snake's cousin finds in his work. This quality of enjoyment is most strongly shown in the Kermesse scene, where also occurs the defiance of the crowd, followed by shrinking from the cross hilts of their swords. The power with which the actor here depicts the utter annihilating terror which seizes Mephistopheles, makes the scene almost painful to witness. The wild stare of agony in the eyes, the teeth clenched in a grin of despair, the trembling limbs, the body bent double with terror, have in them something appalling, and it is a relief when, the cause of this prostration being removed, Mephistopheles resumes, without an effort, his old high bred indifference of demeanour. Only once, except at moments, is this careless manner dropped, until the scene within the cathedral, when Mephistopheles towers above the wretched Gretchen, implacable and majestic as Satan himself. At one other point, the singing of the serenade under her window, the actor represents the devil undisguised; there, however, it is not the grandeur of a fallen angel, but the bitter mockery of a malevolent fiend that is brought out, and it is difficult to imagine anything more appalling than the hellish scorn with which M. Faure invests his tones. The cruel laugh of triumphant hatred seems to chill one's blood.

It is the misfortune of a baritone, or one should perhaps say of a basse-chantante, that it is his province frequently to appear in villanous characters. Don Giovanni, Assur in *Semiramide*, Duke Alfonso in *Lucrezia Borgia*, Caspar in *Der Freischütz*, Nelusko in *L'Africaine*, are among M. Faure's best characters. To the figure of Caspar the actor gives a sullen gloom, relieved only by a savage humour in the moment of his expected triumph. In the incantation scene, by the power of his acting, he imparts life to the somewhat clumsy

stage devices which represent the terrors of Zamiel's dominion. Seeing the struggle in Caspar's mind between a natural inclination to terror and a determination which always supplies fresh courage for every new display of the infernal powers, one forgets that the goblins are absurdly pantomimic, that the serpents move in an impossible fashion, or that the fiery sword refuses to be lighted.

M. Faure as Don Giovanni represents with admirable skill the brilliant fascinating recklessness and imperturbable courage of that most polished and most abominable of scoundrels. To Assur and Duke Alfonso, M. Faure gives in different methods the grandeur of villany; and his Nelusko has all the smouldering ferocity of a savage, with a dignity which not all savages possess.

One of M. Faure's most interesting representations is that of Hamlet. Here, as in the case of Mephistopheles with the fine instinct of a great actor, he triumphs over the clumsiness of the writers of the opera-book, aud shows not the Hamlet of MM. Carré and Barbier, but that of Shakespeare. It is of course open to those who think operatic acting is not acting, to say that as M. Faure has not the difficulties of long spoken soliloquies to contend with, it is extravagant to say that he can play Hamlet; but they could hardly deny that if he has no opportunity for fully interpreting, he at least gives an admirable suggestion of the Prince's character. And in this point his performance is better than that of any other actor of the part, that he has and never loses the aspect and manner of royalty.

In the *Huguenots*, M. Faure has, in England, until lately, played San Bris, a part which requires little beyond a cold and impressive dignity, which no other actor is more capable than M. Faure of giving to it.

When he resumed the part, familiar to him in France, of Nevers, he gave it an importance which one could hardly have thought it could take. Other actors have made not what M. Faure makes, but something considerable out of the scene in which Nevers expresses his indignation at the scheme for the destruction of the Huguenots, and refuses to stain his sword in a massacre But no other actor has grasped the character with the firm and delicate touch of M. Faure; has given so perfect a picture of courtly gaiety and chivalrous devotion. Nevers, as played by M. Faure, becomes the principal figure in the first act; there are a brightness and grace in his joyous manner which give new life to the whole scene. One of the finest conceivable pieces of acting is found in his listening to the propositions of San Bris for the despatch of the Huguenots. One sees the shame and repulsion which gradually grow in his mind as he sits and hears these shocking projects unfolded; and when, rising to his feet, he indignantly flings down his sword, refusing all share in a murder, one wonders that San Bris does not bow before the splendour of his anger.

With this tribute to a talent of vast resources is ended the attempt to describe the characteristics of certain French Players.

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